

COMMITMENT AND SUBJECTIVITY IN THE DISCOURSE OF OPINION COLUMNS AND LEADING ARTICLES. A CORPUS STUDY

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Abstract

This paper explores the expression of author commitment to the *validity* of the information, and the degree of *subjectivity* or *intersubjectivity* involved in the presentation of the information in two genres of newspaper discourse, *opinion columns* and *leading articles*. The dimension of author commitment is analysed in terms of the parameters: *evidentiary validity* and *degree of certainty*. The dimension of subjectivity is studied on the basis of the interaction between two parameters: the degree of *salience* and *explicitness of the role of the subject of conception*, and expression of *personal vs. shared responsibility* for the information.

The results of the corpus study indicate that there are no significant differences between the two genres regarding the dimension of *author commitment*. These two genres within the domain of argumentative discourse, however, differ in the dimension of subjectivity. As is to be expected, there is a greater degree of salience of conceptualizer role and more overt shared responsibility in opinion columns than in leading articles.

1. Introduction

The expression of speaker/writer's stance involves, among other parameters, the degree of commitment of the speaking subject to the validity of the information assessed. Meanings expressed by linguistic elements such as epistemic modals and evidentials contribute to the contentful meaning of the utterance - conceptual domains of epistemic assessment and evidential validity - and are also indexical of the speaker/writer's subjective and intersubjective position (Traugott and Dasher 2002). Epistemic modality concerns speaker/writer's assessment regarding the validity of the communicated proposition (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998, Palmer 2001 *inter alia*). Evidential qualifications indicate speaker/writer's assessment of the validity of the information on the basis of its evidential source, yielding different values in the degree of commitment of the speaking self towards the information proffered (Willett 1988; Mushin 2001; Plungian 2001, Marín-Arrese 2004, 2006; Marín-Arrese *et al.* 2004, *inter alia*).

The notion of subjectivity, since its original formulation by Benveniste (1966 [1958]) as the capacity of the speaking self to view him/herself as subject of enunciation ('sujet d'énonciation'), has been amply discussed in the literature from various perspectives. Lyons (1977) and Traugott (1995) conceive the notion in terms of speaker relatedness, as the speaker's expression of her subjective belief state or attitude toward the proposition. Subjectivity has been characterized by Langacker (1991, 2000, 2002) as the extent to which the information is implicitly grounded in the perspective of the speaker as subject of conception, in contrast to objectivity, whereby the subject of conception or some other facet of the ground is explicit and salient. Sanders and Spooren (1996) and Nuyts (2001) focus on the dimension of subjectivity vs. intersubjectivity as the degree to which the speaker assumes personal responsibility for the evaluation of the evidence or whether the assessment is 'potentially' shared by others. On the basis of these notions, my own proposal considers the interaction of two parameters: degree of 'salience of the role of the conceptualizer' and 'personal vs. shared responsibility' for the communicated proposition.

This paper presents results of a case study on the use of linguistic resources for the expression of commitment and subjectivity in newspaper discourse in English. I have worked

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with a corpus of two genres of newspaper discourse: opinion columns (40,769 words, 40 texts) and leading articles (40,092 words, 72 texts), randomly selected from the Comment sections in *The Guardian* and *The Times*.

The paper¹ aims to explore the conceptual and contextual parameters associated with commitment and subjectivity in argumentative discourse. More specifically, it aims to:

- (i) Study the expression of evidentiary validity and degree of certainty as parameters of degree of author commitment;
- (ii) Analyse the expression of subjectivity/intersubjectivity in terms of the parameters degree of salience and explicitness of the subject of conception, and the expression of personal vs. shared responsibility for the information;
- (iii) Analyse the presence and patterning of these dimensions and parameters in two genres of newspaper discourse: opinion columns and leading articles².

It is hypothesized that:

- (a) There will be a greater occurrence of modal and evidential markers expressing high degree of author commitment - certainty and evidentiary validity - in opinion columns;
- (b) There will be a greater salience of the subject of conception in opinion columns, and a higher presence of expressions involving personal responsibility.

Since the aim of this paper is to explore the expression of author commitment and subjectivity in discourse, I have restricted my study to markers of epistemic modality and to evidential markers of 'personal involvement' (Plungian 2001). The study of mediated evidentiality, the Quotative, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

The dimensions and parameters of commitment and subjectivity and the linguistic resources for the expression of these categories are explored in Sections 2 and 3. The corpus study is described in section 4, together with the results and the discussion. The conclusions are provided in the final section.

2. Author Commitment

2.1. Evidential and Modal Markers

The borderline between evidentiality and modality is not always clear in the literature. As Dendale and Tasmowski (2001: 341-2) note, three relations can be found in recent studies on the domains of evidentiality and epistemic modality: "*disjunction* (where they are conceptually distinguished from each other), *inclusion* (where one is regarded as falling within the semantic scope of the other), and *overlap* (where they partly intersect)". The first position is illustrated by the notion of evidentiality as restricted to the identification of the source and means whereby information is available to the speaker/writer. A broader

¹ This paper presents results of research on Modality in English and Spanish (Research Project: *Elaboración en los aspectos seleccionados de una lexicogramática cognitiva y descriptiva del inglés con especial atención al contraste con el español: segunda fase*. Ref.: BFF2003-07300, funded by the Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología, Spain).

² Most of the texts of the corpus used in this study were compiled and analyzed by myself as part of the research on evidentiality and writer stance in English and Spanish carried out in a prior Research Project (Ref.: BFF2000-0699-C02-02), funded by the Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología, Spain. The other texts were compiled and analyzed by myself prior to both Research Projects mentioned. The corpus includes texts from 1999 to 2003.

conception of evidentiality includes both the source of information and an estimation of its reliability (Chafe 1986). For some, evidentiality is regarded as the superordinate category (Matlock 1989). Others, like Palmer (2001), consider that evidentiality should be subsumed under the domain of modality. Evidential together with epistemic modality would represent two subsystems of propositional modality.

Plungian (2001: 354) argues in favour of the distinction between evidential and modal values and notes that grammaticalization of the notion of reliability yields what he terms "modalized evidential systems".

While an evidential supplement can always be seen in an epistemic marker, the opposite does not always hold: not all evidential markers are modal in that they do not all necessarily imply an epistemic judgement.

Further arguments are those proposed by Fitneva (2001), who argues for a distinction between 'speaker-attitude markers', and 'source-of-information markers', which involve a 'co-constructed' (Du Bois 1986; Duranti 1993) evaluation of the information, allowing the hearer to assess the reliability of the information. The position that both domains are distinct but partly intersect is held by van der Auwera and Plungian (1998), who note that the interface between the two domains is that of inferential evidentiality and epistemic necessity.

Following van der Auwera and Plungian (1998), Fitneva (2001) and Plungian (2001), I maintain the distinction between speaker-oriented reliability judgements expressed by epistemic modal markers, and assessments of the validity of the information coded by evidential markers. Modals implicitly indicate the author's subjective estimations of the reliability of the information, indicating different degrees of certainty (*must*>*will*>*may*). Direct evidential markers explicitly code the writer's subjective "*evidentiary justification*" (Givon 1982: 24) for the information proffered (*I firmly believe*>*I think*>*I suppose*), which depending on the context (expert source, etc.) would be accepted and unchallenged by the reader to a higher or lesser degree. Impersonal evidential expressions (*that means*>*it seems*>*that suggests*) evoke some intersubjective virtual conceptualizer.

2.2. Epistemic Modality and Degree of Certainty.

Epistemic modality involves speaker/writer's assessment of the communicated proposition and encodes different degrees of certainty regarding its truth (van der Auwera and Plungian 1998, Palmer 2001 *inter alia*): necessity (*must*, *cannot*); probability (*will*, *would*, *should*); possibility (*may*, *could*).

Langacker (1991: 274) notes that the notion of potency involved in epistemic modality is associated with the natural evolution of events in the world. As such the speaker as primary conceptualizer is "the person responsible for assessing the likelihood of reality evolving in a certain way". He notes that *must* "conveys immediacy" and indicates that "confirmation is regarded as virtually inevitable", whereas *will* "implies that confirmation requires a non-negligible expansion of present knowledge (so that new information might alter the prediction)" (Langacker 1991: 280).

Similarly, Gotti (2003: 286) observes that deductive *must* suggests that there is only one possible conclusion drawn from the observable facts, whereas predictive *will* seems to indicate a possible conclusion or a reasonable explanation drawn from "generally known facts". In the realm of possibility, the distinction between experience and general knowledge

is neutralized or blurred, since there is little difference between "absence of real confidence" and "absence of good grounds for a conclusion" (Palmer 2001: 34-35).

- (1) There is an idea that because we give children television sets in their bedrooms, we [must] really love and respect them. (EOG10JM)³
- (2) Whatever new force some day arises on the right, we [shall] not see old Toryism again. (EOG13JM)
- (3) The reason for the indifference [may] lie in the nature of the celebration, which is to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. (ELG10JM)

As in previous studies, we distinguish three degrees on the scale of certainty: high, medium and low.

(a) High certainty:

Modals: *must, cannot, can (only), could (hardly), couldn't*.

Modal markers: *assuredly, bound to, certainly, inevitably, of course, in reality, sure, surely,...*

(b) Medium certainty:

Modals: *should, will, would, shall (not), won't*

Modal markers: *liable, likely, probable, probably, ...*

(c) Low certainty:

Modals: *may, might, could, can*

Modal markers: *improbably, maybe, perhaps, possibly, unlikely, ...*

- (4) [Certainly], none of the larger parties emerged triumphant this week. (ELG22JM)

2.3. Evidentiality and Evidentiary Validity.

The evidential system concerns the specification of the source of evidence available to the speaker/writer, and, in some systems, the various verbal and non-verbal markers also indicate their attitude towards the reliability of the information (Givon 1982; Chafe 1986; Willett 1988; Mushin 2001; *inter alia*).

Different subdivisions of the domain of evidentiality can be found in the literature. Willett (1988: 96) distinguishes two subdomains: direct evidence, which refers to visual, auditory and other sensory sources, and indirect evidence, which includes reported information (second-hand, third-hand, from folklore) and inferred information (from results, from reasoning). Plungian (2001: 352ff), for his part, distinguishes between the parameters 'forms of access to the information' (direct vs. indirect evidence) and 'speaker's involvement' (personal vs. mediated evidence). The combination of these parameters results in a three-way distinction: (a) Direct personal evidence, which includes visual and sensory evidence, as well as an endophoric category to express "speaker's inner state"; (b) Reflected evidence, that is, personal indirect access to the evidence through "synchronous inference", "retrospective

³ The coding system used in the classification of the texts in the corpus is exemplified as follows:

EOG10: English, opinion column, The Guardian, Text n° 10.

ELG10: English, leading article, The Guardian, Text n° 10.

EOT12: English, opinion column, Text n° 12.

ELT04: English, leading article, Text n° 4.

JM: compiled by Juana Marín.

inference", or "reasoning"; (c) Mediated evidence, indirect access to the information through some other person's statements or beliefs.

These distinctions between sources of evidence and direct or indirect access to knowledge should not be interpreted in absolute terms, as Fitneva (2001: 406) points out:

Perceptual information is processed and moulded in the mind, so there is some cognitive or inferential process involved. Conversely, inferential information starts with a perceptual stimulus. A better way to think about the linguistic markers for source of information is that they emphasize *an aspect* of the acquisition of the information. There is a fuzzy boundary between perception and cognition that might or might not be codified in language.

Evidential markers reflect different degrees of speaker commitment towards the information expressed. Perceptual evidence has traditionally been associated (Willett 1988) with a higher degree of validity, whereas evidence based on reasoning suggests a lesser degree of speaker commitment. Mushin (2001: 66) notes that evidential expressions indicating 'personal experience epistemological stance' (*I saw that ...*, *I heard that ...*), tend to signal a high degree of confidence in the validity of the information. However, indirect evidential markers, which evoke an 'inferential epistemological stance', may reflect different degrees of speaker commitment regarding the validity of the information (*I conclude>It seems*).

Evidentiary validity is related to the parameters: 'source of evidence' presupposed and 'directly accessed vs. indirectly inferred information' (Marín Arrese 2004). There are also cases of meaning-shift where verbs of communication are used to code inferential processes in the access to information. In Marín-Arrese (2006), I proposed the following semantic subdomains (cf. Langacker's (1991) distinction between physical domain, mental domain, and domain of social interaction):

	Personal Direct	Personal Indirect	Mediated
Perceptual	<i>I see</i>	<i>It seems</i>	<i>They see</i>
Cognitive	<i>I think</i>	<i>I conclude</i>	<i>They believe</i>
Communicative	<i>I state</i>	<i>That suggests</i>	<i>They say</i>

Fig. 1. Parameters of Evidentiality

In this paper, the categories will be distinguished, on the basis of what aspect is emphasized in the acquisition of the information, and/or how the author conceptualizes the source:

(i) Perceptual: These are markers that emphasize 'the perceptual aspect' of the acquisition of the information (Fitneva 2001) indicating that the author has direct personal sensory access to the evidence, or that the evidence is perceptually available to her/himself and (potentially) also to the addressee/reader (i.e., *discover*, *feel*, *find*, *hear*, *notice*, *observe*, *perceive*, *recognise*, *see*, *watch*, *witness*,...).

(5) When you consider Mr Blair's occasional tendency to commit from the hip, and when you [see] how much nervous energy has been expended in Whitehall over the past three days over his pledge to bring ... (ELG23JM)

Indirect perceptual markers emphasize the inferential process in the acquisition of information on the basis of observable results; that is, "the evidence is presented as a sign, or a direct proof, for the claim" (Sanders 1999: 478) (i.e., *appear*, *indicate*, *look (as if/like)*, *reflect*, *seem*, *show*, *signal*, *sound (like)*, ...).

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- (6) If, as [seems] likely, the body found yesterday at Harrowdown Hill is identified as that of Dr David Kelly, the row between... (ELT65JM)
- (7) If anything, you get the [feeling] that some of us don't think children deserve quite so much love. (EOG10JM)

In languages marking evidentiality implicitly through lexical means, as is the case in English and Spanish, we often find perception verbs which undergo semantic extension to cognitive evidential uses. The metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING motivates and structures these meaning-shifts in verbs of visual perception, on the basis of "speaker's deduction based on the perception of the end results of an event" (Matlock 1989: 216).

- (8) He might have right on his side, but we can all [see] that he'd be wrong. (EOG60JM)

Within this category, evidential verbal (V) markers found in the corpus have been classified according to the following scale of validity:

- (a) High validity: *demonstrate, hear, highlight, reveal, see, show, witness...*
- (b) Medium validity: *appear, indicate, feel, look, perceive, reflect, seem, sound, ...*
- (c) Low validity: *(seldom) hear, get the feeling,...*

Non-verbal markers include:

- (a) High validity: *clear, clearly, evident, evidently, noticeably, obvious, obviously, palpable, palpably, plain, plainly,...*
- (b) Medium validity: *apparent, apparently, indication, seemingly, sign/s,...*
- (c) Low validity: *no evidence, no sign, unclear,...*

- (9) But he has [clearly] adopted tougher tactics in the countdown to the showdown with Jacques Chirac on May 5. (ELG20JM)

(ii) Cognitive: The markers included here underscore the cognitive basis of the information proffered by the writer ('endophoric' markers, Plungian 2001). They include predicates of belief and/or general knowledge where "the speaker voices personal views belonging in the realm of strictly individual experiences or attitudes" (Nuyts 2001:122). (i.e., *believe, bet, consider, doubt, expect, imagine, know, realise, reckon, remember, suspect, think, ...*).

- (10) I [know] from personal experience the abiding gratitude they felt for the country that gave them a place of safety, ... (EOT10JM)

Indirect cognitive markers, also included here, underscore access to the information as a result of mental processes (generalization, deduction, ...). This is parallel to what Fitneva (2001: 409) terms 'conclusional' information. In these cases, "the relation between claim and evidence is established indirectly, via a reason: a relation of consequence" (Sanders 1999: 478) (i.e., *assume, conclude, deduce, estimate, infer, mean, predict, prove, suppose,...*).

- (11) What this [means] is that it is rare for neighbours to converse and rarer still for them to ask and get help. (ELG10JM)

The scale of validity relative to the expressions found in the corpus is the following:

- (a) High validity: *be aware, know, learn, mean, prove, realise, remember, ...*
- (b) Medium validity: *believe, consider, expect, reckon, think,...*
- (c) Low validity: *assume, doubt, imagine, suppose, suspect, ...*

Non-verbal markers include:

- (a) High validity: *doubtless, no doubt, undoubtedly,...*
- (b) Medium validity: *predictably,...*

(c) Low validity: *doubts*,...

(12) David Blunkett is his own greatest admirer, so he [doubtless] feels pretty good about his week's work. (ELG13JM)

(iii) Communicative: In this category I have included a few examples found of performative uses of verbs of communication. Examples of self-attribution were also found.

(13) To Mr Blunkett we [say] this. Yes, there needs to be debate about practical solutions to practical problems like pressure on resources... (ELG13JM)

(14) When I last wrote on this subject in the Guardian six years ago, I [argued] that there was an unanswerable case for comprehensive drug legalisation in the US. (EOG01JM)

Most of the expressions found, however, involve meaning-shifts from the domain of verbal communication to the domain of cognitive conclusional processes (i.e. *That implies, says something, suggests, tells us, ...*).

(15) ..., and it is to be hoped that his response [augurs] a more rational stance to the drugs question on the part of the government. (EOG01JM)

(16) The intervening 16 years [suggest] it is not leadership for the middle class, but jobs for the working class that staves off social unrest. (EOG04JM)

The scale of validity for verbal markers in this category is the following:

(a) High validity: *(everyone) agree, argue, assure, (always) claim*,...

(b) Medium validity: *augur, (not) deny, imply, report, say, suggest, tell*,...

(c) Low validity: *(no one/should) say*,...

Non-verbal markers include:

(a) High validity: *undeniably, indisputable*,...

(b) Medium validity: *admittedly, reportedly*,...

(c) Low validity: *debatable, no suggestion*,...

(17) Mr Blair's good intentions are [indisputable], his faith is plain. (ELG53JM)

The different modes of access to the information reflect different values on a scale of author's commitment. Direct perceptual evidence might seem to be afforded higher evidentiary validity by the hearer/reader than cognitive or communicative evidence. In the latter case, validity of the information is linked to the degree to which the source is expert. At the same time within each category we also find different scalar values, indirect inferential uses would appear to rank lower in evidentiary validity. The following continuum was suggested in Marín-Arrese (2006):

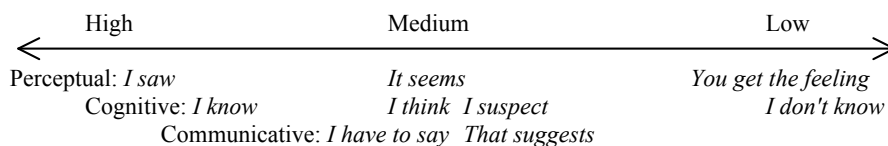


Fig. 2. Evidentiary Validity

3. Subjectivity

The parameters I explore within the dimension of subjectivity are the salience of the role of the conceptualizer and the degree to which the speaker/writer assumes responsibility for the

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information proffered. I have restricted this part of the corpus study to verbal markers of epistemic modality and evidentiality. The role and status of non-verbal markers regarding the dimension of subjectivity is not clear in the literature. Nuyts (2001: 206) considers that modal adverbs (*possibly*) are neutral in terms of their (inter)subjectivity, whereas modal adjectives (*it is possible that*) suggest a more intersubjective value. One might argue that evidential adverbs and adjectives (*obviously, it is clear that*) indicate 'potentially' shared access to perceptual evidence and evoke some virtual intersubjective conceptualizer, in a similar way to that of impersonal verbal markers (*it seems*). Modal adjectives and adverbs lack this intersubjective value; they evoke an virtual implicit conceptualizer. The analysis of the role of non-verbal markers as indices of subjectivity/intersubjectivity, however, is beyond the scope of the present paper (cf. Marín-Arrese 2007a).

3.1. *Salience of Conceptualizer Role*

Langacker's (1991, 2000, 2002) notion of subjectivity is explained drawing on perceptual notions. In a situation of 'optimal viewing arrangement', the 'viewer' or subject of conception remains 'offstage', thus being implicit and construed as maximally subjective, whereas the entity which functions as object of conception is put 'onstage' and is thus salient and objectively construed. In contrast, in a situation of 'egocentric viewing arrangement', the conceptualizer goes 'onstage', thus becoming more salient and objectified.

When the speaker/writer functions solely as conceptualizer, his/her role is maximally subjective; s/he is not designated by any linguistic expression nor implicitly evoked. When explicitly designated, as in the evidential expressions *I suppose* or *We think*, the conceptualizer is maximally objectified since s/he is part of the object of conceptualization. However, as Sanders (1999) observes, though the conceptualizer is objectified, these evidential expressions maximally foreground the conceptualizer's estimations of the validity of the information, so that what is expressed by the sentence is maximally subjectified.

Epistemic modals, according to Langacker (2000: 297), are grounding predications which evoke the primary conceptualizers, the speaker/writer and hearer/reader, "as viewers [...] without ever mentioning them explicitly". Nonetheless, as Sanders (1999: 473) notes, the conceptualizer is objectified to a certain extent in that s/he functions as an implicit point of reference within the predication; epistemic modals create subjectivity by evoking the author's "active consciousness", so that "what is expressed by the sentence is subjectified" to a certain extent.

In the case of impersonal evidential expressions (*it seems, that means*), the presence of the speaking subject is opaque, so that the role of the conceptualizer is almost maximally subjective and the conceptualization seems to be more objectively construed than in the case of modals. Langacker (2000: 350) notes that with an expression such as *it seems*, the conceptualizer may be "only potential" or "is construed generically or in a generalized fashion".

Drawing on these notions, a continuum may be identified in the dimension of subjectivity in terms of the parameter 'salience or overttness of the role of the conceptualizer', ranging from cases where the conceptualizer is part of the object of conceptualization and is thus encoded as the explicit source of the evaluation, to those where the conceptualizer is implicit and non-salient, and those where the role of the current speaker as source of the evaluation is opaque (Marín-Arrese 2006, 2007a).

Explicit

Implicit

Opaque

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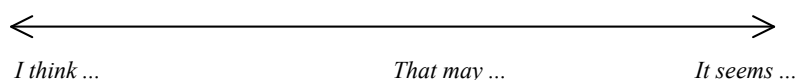


Figure 3. Salience of the role of conceptualizer

3.2. Subjective vs. Intersubjective Evidentiality.

Nuyts (2001: 34) reframes the notion of subjectivity in terms of "the quality and/or the status of one's evidence for an epistemic judgment". He conceives the dimension of subjectivity vs. intersubjectivity as involving "an indication of whether the speaker is solely responsible for the epistemic evaluation of the state of affairs – i.e., subjectivity – or, alternatively, whether she shares this evaluation with others, possibly including the hearer – i.e., intersubjectivity" (Nuyts 2002: 447).

(a) Subjective: *I can see, I think,...*

(b) Intersubjective: *We can see, It seems, (it is possible that),...*

(c) Neutral: *may, (possibly),...*

A debatable aspect in his proposal is the view that modals should be considered evidentially neutral with respect to (inter)subjectivity. Nuyts (2001: 206) argues that the "(inter)subjective meaning element is not inherent in the modal as such, but only arises due to contextual conditions". I would contend this view, since both deductive *must* and predictive *will* often have evidential nuances which lend them an intersubjective value. And though the inferential or conclusional nuance is blurred in epistemic *may*, this does not necessarily imply that it should be considered neutral in terms of subjectivity.

Sanders and Spooren (1996: 245) have observed that modals *may* or *must* express knowledge-based evidence, which "presupposes reasoning on the basis of personal conviction". For them, degree of subjectivity is best viewed in terms of the degree to which the speaker's active consciousness is foregrounded (high subjectivity: *I think*; semisubjective: *may, must*; non-subjective: *It appears*). They also note that whereas I-embeddings "explicitly encode the speaker/writer's personal limitation of the validity of information" (personal responsibility), in the case of perceptual evidentials, such as *It seems*, "the commitment to the validity of the information is shared or at least potentially shared by the speaker/listener and other participants" (non-subjective or intersubjective responsibility) (Sanders and Spooren 1996: 246). Cognitive and communicative evidential expressions (*that means, that suggests*), are similarly opaque in that though they seem to indicate that the speaker is responsible for the evaluation, they also leave open the possibility of potentially sharing the evaluation with other participants.

The following continuum may be identified for the degree to which the speaker assumes personal responsibility for the evaluation of the evidence (subjectivity) or presents the assessment as 'potentially' or explicitly shared by others (intersubjectivity).

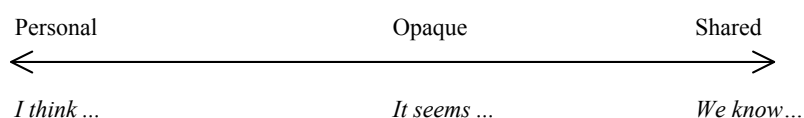


Figure 4. Personal vs. shared responsibility

3.3. Subjectivity/Intersubjectivity

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Epistemic modals, which implicitly invoke the subject of conception, indicate speaker's personal responsibility. One of the grammatical properties of grounding elements such as modals is that an utterance with a modal does not readily accept an expansion to include the explicit mention of the speaker or hearer (**For me, there could have been...*). As Langacker (2002: 13) notes, "a grounding element does not specifically mention the ground, despite evoking it as a reference point".

Evidential expressions not designating the speaker explicitly may be interpreted as evoking shared responsibility. In contrast with modals, impersonal evidential expressions accept expansions which include the explicit mention of the speaker/writer (*It seems to me..., It sounds to me like ..., For me, that means that ..., It is clear to me that ...*). I would argue that in this case the speaker/writer is presenting the complement proposition as part of the epistemic dominion of a virtual conceptualizer (Langacker 2004), but one which is intersubjectively available. The speaker/writer, by identifying with this intersubjective virtual conceptualizer, narrows down the mental activity to him/herself.

My proposal for the analysis of subjectivity/intersubjectivity considers the interaction of the parameters salience or overttness of the role of the conceptualizer, which refers to the degree of 'explicitness', 'implicitness' or 'opaqueness' of the presence of the conceptualizer and 'personal vs. shared responsibility' for the information. A four-fold distinction is thus made (Marín-Arrese 2006, 2007a):

(i) Explicit personal responsibility: The current speaker is overtly the sole source of the evaluation. We find examples in the various evidential domains where reference is explicitly made to the speaker as subject of conception, by means of predicates with personal subjects (*I think...; I would say...; I saw..., It seems to me..., I am sure...; I am aware...*)

(18) [I] can remember Tony Blair and Gordon Brown feeling immensely frustrated by the slow pace of change and the lack of urgency... (EOT12JM)

(ii) Explicit shared responsibility: The speaker overtly presents the evaluation as explicitly shared with the interlocutor (*As you can see...*), or with other subjects (*We felt...*), or as universally shared (*We all know..., Everyone knows...*). This includes the use of 'inclusive we' in reference to "an incompletely defined collectivity that includes the speaker and one or more others, without specifying who they are" (Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990: 745). I have also included cases involving 'impersonal' or 'vague' uses of pronouns (Kitagawa and Lehrer 1990), where the speaker's voice and speaker's responsibility is diffuse (*You would think..., Anyone knows...*).

(19) At the same time, [we] may wonder how best they can be assimilated, and whether the official doctrine of multiculturalism is a wise one. (EOT52JM)

(20) His craft was by his own admission plundered from Raphael but if you didn't know that [you'd] think he had conceived of himself as an impious van der Weyden. (EOT53JM)

(iii) Implicit personal responsibility: The author functions as the sole conceptualizer, the implicit subject of consciousness. The author does not acknowledge personal responsibility for the evaluation, nor is the evaluation based on evidence which is shared or accessible. (Modals: *May, will, must...*)

- (21) The damage is hard to gauge. It [will] not enhance Greek bureaucracy's poor reputation. It [may] hurt tourism. (ELT04JM)

(iv) Opaque personal/shared responsibility: The presence of the author as conceptualizer is opaque. The implicit conceptualizer may be the author or it may some virtual conceptualizer, since the qualification is based on evidence which is tacitly shared with others or 'potentially' accessible to the readership. In some cases, the conceptualizer may be construed generically. A variety of linguistic resources are found in this case: impersonal evidential predicates (*It seems, It sounds like, It implies...*), predicates with discourse deictic *that* as subject (*That shows, That means, That suggests...*), and agentless passives (*It was felt...*).

- (22) The main focus of concern used to be the effect of tourism on wildlife, but it [seems] these days that the wildlife has the edge over the teeming poor. (EOT01JM)

4. Corpus Study

4.1. The Texts.

I have worked with a corpus of two genres of newspaper discourse: opinion columns (40,769 words, 40 texts) and leading articles (40,092 words, 72 texts), randomly selected from the Comment sections in *The Guardian* and *The Times*. The corpus includes texts from 1999 to 2003. The topic areas of both types of texts include: politics, economy, and various social issues.

4.2. The Parameters.

The various epistemic and evidential expressions were assigned different values according to the parameters explained above. The texts were examined and the examples found were analysed and tagged manually according to the parameters identified above. An electronic search using Monoconc was carried out to ensure that all the instances of evidential and modal qualifications present in the texts had been identified. The data were submitted to further analysis for the quantitative results.

4.3. Results and Discussion.

Table 1 shows raw figures and ratios per thousand words of the different forms of modal and evidential qualifications in opinion columns and leading articles: evidential lexical verbs, evidential non-verbal markers, modal auxiliaries and modal non-verbal markers.

There is parallelism in the results across genres and across newspapers. Opinion columns and leading articles, as exemplars of argumentative discourse, seem to be characterized by considerable use of modal (epistemic modals) and evidential (lexical predicates) qualifications. The figures contrast with the ratios found in news reports (Marín Arrese 2004: 178): 2.246 per thousand words for epistemic modals and 2.007 per thousand words for evidential lexical verbs (see also Marín-Arrese *et al.* 2004, and Marín Arrese and Núñez Perucha 2006). Total commitment to the communicated proposition is zero-marked in most languages (Bybee *et al.* 1994), reflecting the workings of our cultural models of

knowledge whereby information is assumed to be true unless otherwise indicated (Matlock 1989). These results thus indicate that in opinion columns and leading articles, as is to be expected, include a higher number of qualifications which reflect that there is less than total commitment by the author; this contrasts with news reports, which purportedly aim to present the information as objective and true.

OPINION COLUMNS	The Guardian		The Times		TOTAL	
	20,308 words 20 texts		20,461 words 20 texts		40,769 words 40 texts	
	N	R	N	R	N	R
Evidential VM	129	6.352	110	5.376	239	5.862
Evidential NVM	26	1.280	28	1.368	54	1.324
Modal Aux.	107	5.268	121	5.914	228	5.592
Modal NVM	50	2.462	41	2.003	91	2.232
TOTAL	312	15.363	300	14.662	612	15.011
LEADING ARTICLES	The Guardian		The Times		TOTAL	
	20,045 words 40 texts		20,047 words 32 texts		40,092 words 72 texts	
	N	R	N	R	N	R
Evidential VM	114	5.687	75	3.741	189	4.714
Evidential NVM	33	1.646	23	1.147	56	1.397
Modal Aux.	107	5.338	157	7.831	264	6.585
Modal NVM	48	2.395	30	1.496	78	1.945
TOTAL	302	15.066	285	14.216	587	14.641

Table 1. Type of Qualification in Opinion Columns and Leading Articles (ratio per thousand words).

Tables 2 and 3 present results pertaining to the dimension of author commitment in the two genres: degree of evidentiary validity and degree of certainty. Both genres within the domain of argumentative discourse favour medium to high evidentiary validity markers (see Ex. 8: *We can all see...*, and Ex. 10: *I know ...*), and low or medium certainty modal markers (especially modal auxiliaries) (e.g., low: *may, might, ...*, medium: *will, would, ...*). The only noticeable difference across newspapers is the tendency of *The Guardian* to use markers involving medium evidentiary validity in both genres (e.g., *It seems...*). In leading articles, *The Times* also shows a higher frequency of modal markers involving low certainty (e.g., *may, might, ...*).

OPINION COLUMNS	The Guardian				The Times				TOTAL	
	20,308 words				20,461 words				40,769 w.	
COMMITMENT	V	NV	N	R	V	NV	N	R	N	R
High EV	51	15	66	3.249	46	18	64	3.127	130	3.188
High C	4	26	30	1.477	4	15	19	0.928	49	1.201
Total High	55	41	96	4.727	50	33	83	4.056	179	4.390
Medium EV	61	10	71	3.496	51	8	59	2.883	130	3.188
Medium C	38	9	47	2.314	57	11	68	3.323	115	2.820
Total Medium	99	19	118	5.810	108	19	127	6.206	245	6.009
Low EV	17	1	18	0.886	13	2	15	0.733	33	0.809
Low C	65	15	80	3.939	60	15	75	3.665	155	3.801
Total Low	82	16	98	4.825	73	17	90	4.398	188	4.611

TOTAL	236	76	312	15.363	231	69	300	14.662	612	15.011
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Table 2. Parameters of Author Commitment in Opinion Columns.

Non-verbal markers of high evidentiary validity (e.g., *clearly*, *obviously*, *no doubt*, ...) tend to exhibit the highest values. In the case of modal non-verbal markers, the tendency is split between the two polar values: necessity (e.g., *certainly*, ...) and possibility (e.g., *perhaps*, ...).

LEADING ARTICLES	The Guardian				The Times				TOTAL	
	20,045 words				20,047 words				40,092 w.	
COMMITMENT	V	NV	N	R	V	NV	N	R	N	R
High EV	37	19	56	2.793	30	16	46	2.294	102	2.544
High C	4	19	23	1.147	3	13	16	0.798	39	0.972
Total High	41	38	79	3.941	33	29	62	3.092	141	3.516
Medium EV	62	11	73	3.641	35	4	39	1.945	112	2.793
Medium C	41	4	45	2.244	51	9	60	2.992	105	2.618
Total Medium	103	15	118	5.886	86	13	99	4.938	217	5.412
Low EV	15	3	18	0.897	10	3	13	0.648	31	0.773
Low C	62	25	87	4.340	103	8	111	5.536	198	4.938
Total Low	77	28	105	5.238	113	11	124	6.185	229	5.711
TOTAL	221	81	302	15.066	232	53	285	14.216	587	14.641

Table 3. Parameters of Author Commitment in Leading Articles.

Figure 5 illustrates the global results for opinion columns and leading articles (ratio per thousand words). No really significant differences are found across genres (Chi-square= 9.72, Df: 2, $p \leq 0.008$).

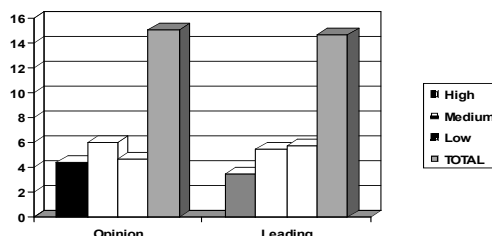


Fig. 5. Author Commitment in Opinion Columns and leading Articles

Tables 4 and 5 present results for the parameters of Subjectivity. Opinion columns clearly favour the use of markers which evoke the implicit presence of the conceptualizer (e.g. *may*, *must*,...) and there is also a considerable amount of markers indicating opaque intersubjectively shared responsibility (e.g., *That shows*, ...).

OPINION COLUMNS	The Guardian		The Times		TOTAL	
	20,308 words		20,461 words		40,769 words	
SUBJECTIVITY	N	R	N	R	N	R
Explicit Personal	15	0.739	25	1.222	40	0.981

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Explicit Shared	29	1.428	22	1.075	51	1.251
Implicit Personal	126	6.204	137	6.696	263	6.451
Opaque Personal/Shared	66	3.250	47	2.297	113	2.772
TOTAL	236	11.621	231	11.290	467	11.455

Table 4. Parameters of Subjectivity in Opinion Columns.

The values for explicit personal (e.g., *I know, I believe, ...*) or shared responsibility (e.g. *We can all see, ...*) clearly contrast with those of leading articles, where we find no instances of subjectivity involving the explicit reference to the writer/conceptualizer, and very few cases of explicit mention of the intersubjective conceptualizer.

LEADING ARTICLES	The Guardian		The Times		TOTAL	
	20,045 words		20,047 words		40,092 words	
SUBJECTIVITY	N	R	N	R	N	R
Explicit Personal	0	0.000	0	0.000	0	0.000
Explicit Shared	10	0.499	6	0.299	16	0.399
Implicit Personal	134	6.685	171	8.530	305	7.608
Opaque Personal/Shared	77	3.841	55	2.744	132	3.292
TOTAL	221	11.025	232	11.573	453	11.299

Table 5. Parameters of Subjectivity in Leading Articles.

As in opinion columns, the figures for implicit personal responsibility and opaque intersubjective responsibility are the highest.

Figure 6 illustrates the global results for subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the two genres (ratio per thousand words). The differences are significant (Chi-square= 62.7, Df: 3, $p \leq 0.0001$).

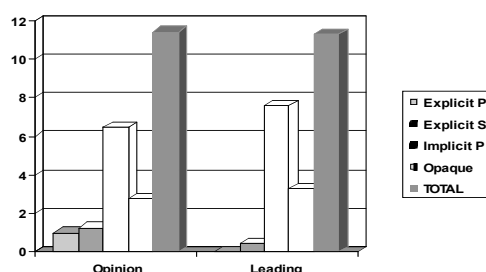


Fig. 5. Subjectivity/Intersubjectivity in Opinion Columns and Leading Articles.

These results illustrate the distinctive properties of these two genres within the domain of argumentative discourse. In the expression of author commitment to the validity of the information, both genres tend to rely on medium to high evidentiary validity markers. However, information which is more implicitly grounded (modal markers) in the perspective of the author tends to have low certainty values. The clear differentiating feature between these two genres is to be found in the salience of the author/conceptualizer. In opinion columns, the subject of conception is in most cases implicitly or opaquely present, but there are instances where his/her presence is explicitly invoked. In leading articles, the conceptualizer is either implicitly evoked, or is completely offstage and construed opaquely.

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The only cases where the conceptualizer's presence is explicitly invoked involve cases of intersubjectivity.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have explored the dimensions of author commitment and subjectivity/intersubjectivity in terms of a set of parameters which I have argued characterize these dimensions. The study has focused on the expression of commitment and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, by means of linguistic resources pertaining to the domains of evidentiality and epistemic modality, in journalistic discourse, and more specifically in opinion columns and leading articles. The framework for this study is explained in more detail in Marín (2006). Previous studies have focused on political discourse in English and Spanish (Marín 2007a) and on judicial vs. political discourse (Marín 2007b). Further research is necessary in terms of contrastive studies in journalistic discourse, and in comparative studies across genres and discourse domains.

Results of our corpus study are consistent with the assumed characteristic features of the two genres within the domain of argumentative discourse. As regards the dimension of commitment, in both genres the author tends to use medium to high evidentiary validity markers, thus expressing quite a high degree of commitment to the information when making reference to an evidential source. However, the author adopts a more tentative stance, a lower degree of commitment, in qualifying his/her statements by means of low or medium certainty modal markers, that is, when presenting the information from an implicit subjective perspective. Overall, opinion columns are characterized by the use of evidentiary validity and certainty markers expressing medium values of commitment, whereas leading articles are characterized by the use of low to medium values.

The subtle difference between these genres is to be found in the dimension of subjectivity/intersubjectivity. Both opinion columns and leading articles are characterized by the use of implicit subjectivity, and to a lower degree by markers of opaque intersubjectivity. Leading articles, however, are also characterized by the total lack of explicit subjectivity markers, and very few markers of explicit intersubjectivity. This form of institutional expression obviously aims to mystify the author/conceptualizer's presence in the discourse.

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